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Roesch, F.

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The Inter as Liminal Spaces: Prudence, Transience, and Affection

Felix Rösch
Coventry University

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If we accept the premise that IR should be the study of differences than the 'inter' has to take center stage, as it is within this realm of the "in-between" (cf. Berenskoetter 2007; Thomassen 2012; Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015; Valbjørn this forum) that dialogues can evolve, enabling people to speak across differences. It is argued that the 'inter' is constituted in liminal spaces. Being under-appreciated in IR (Mälksoo 2012, 482), the anthropologist Inge Daniels (2010) helps to provide a first visualization of its meaning in her study of the Japanese house. In a typical Japanese house, the genkan (entryway) constitutes a liminal space, as it is distinguishable from the rest. Separated by a step, it is a space in-between, which "enables informal exchanges between the inhabitants of the house and visitors" (Daniels 2010, 61). Hence, the genkan does neither fully belong to the privacy of the house nor to the public sphere.

In IR, we can define liminal spaces similarly. As assemblages of material objects and inter-human relations, liminality is a characteristic of non-spaces (Neumann 2012, 474). Following Marc Augé (1995), highly structured mono-functional areas that lack identity and history make up such spaces. This assumption, however, seems inappropriate given that Augé is mainly referring to the infrastructural network of today's globalized world like train stations, (air)ports, bus stops, roads, and hotels, as many of them have extensive histories. Still, people do not continuously inhabit them because they merely facilitate human transit from one place to another. This alludes to a further characteristic. Liminal spaces are also unstructured (Thomassen 2009, 20). People pass through them every day, offering a myriad of opportunities for human encounters. Since the composition of people is temporally conditioned, these encounters are relational and never identical. Hence, liminal spaces are socially constructed entities that defy fixed characterizations and rather stress the processual character of life (Mälksoo 2012, 482). Feminist scholarship has demonstrated that knowledge-power relations in what Christine Sylvester (2002, 255) calls "borderlands" are particularly pronounced because people are in a precarious situation. They are removed from their habitual sphere, making their knowledge potentially unsuitable. However, liminality does not only cover the extraordinary, but it is in fact a "fundamental human experience" (Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015, 3) that can affect every aspect of human life. Focusing on the diversity of gender, Laura Sjoberg (2012) for example has shown that the precariousness of liminality is an everyday occurrence even in the habitual sphere.

To explore liminality further, we first distinguish it from marginalization, as the latter is usually referred to as a space that encourages dialogue and knowledge-exchange, in particular. Scholars follow this by an investigation into the precariousness of liminal spaces and their subsequent increased communicative activity to provide the grounds for a discussion of major aspects of liminality: prudence, transience, and affection.

While it may be that marginalization provides for the spatio-temporal requirements to resist promises of absolute knowledge, as Richard Ashley and R.B.J. Walker (1990, 262) argued, marginalized spaces do not encourage dialogues. Rather, unilateral communication attempts characterize marginalization. Societal majorities are usually unwilling to engage with knowledge that is intended to question the habitual. As long as majoritarian "collective memories" (Assmann 1995) enable people to bring their experiences into what they consider to be a rational order, there will be limited interest in challenging this system. IR evidences this. Then ISA-president Robert Keohane (1988) urged critical theories to move towards mainstream explanatory theories to be considered worthwhile additions to IR-theorizing. Equally, Ann Tickner (1997) demonstrates that because feminism is operating with different ontological and epistemological assumptions, IR is still often at odds with feminist contributions. Consequently, misunderstandings rather than dialogues emerge. In marginalized spaces, therefore, foreignness is an absolute category whose dichotomic reality constructions do not allow for dialogues (in the sense of opening up a space for common, unprepossessed thinking). Rather, discussions in the form of defending antagonistic thoughts emerge, in which the marginalized thought-collective is either forced to follow the mainstream or, if unwilling to renounce its thoughts, accepts to remain marginalized (Radtke 2011). Although these knowledge-power relations are equally pronounced in liminal spaces, people have the opportunity to engage with them constructively (Sjoberg 2012, 347). The wellbeing of people relies on dialogues, which enable them to survive in these precarious spaces. Here, foreignness is not an absolute category, but it is relational because it applies to everyone. Although it is beyond the as normality perceived established order, foreignness is continuously experienced in liminal spaces and, therefore, it is regarded as an integral part to human existence (Behr 2014).

This precariousness of liminal spaces rests on two aspects. First, there is a physical aspect; being on the move exposes people to danger. Some of them are related to weather conditions, as people are extradited to natural disasters. Even common weather conditions can be a disruptive experience, as beautifully depicted by Utagawa Hiroshige in his woodblock-print series Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō. At the forty-fifth station (Shōno), he painted travelers seeking refuge from a downpour. Dangers also arise from means of transportation, as they can lead to accidents. Repeatedly, accidents have been the topic of artists, as exemplified in the work of Frida Kahlo, demonstrating that art canalizes and provides an outlet for emotions that people experience in face of the abnormal, violent, and awful (Bleiker 2009). Also, people on the move are facing higher risks of suffering from and spreading contagious diseases. Jürgen Osterhammel (2009, 283–90) for example highlighted how cholera came to be known as the "travelling epidemic" during the nineteenth century. Finally, getting into contact with strangers can be perceived as a threat and

even cause conflicts. As the recent refugee-crisis in Europe epitomizes, they may arise due to disagreements about allocations of resources (Osterhammel 2009, 228) or because of challenges to local gender roles and society norms in general (Ling 2007, 142). This physical precariousness also affects people in their own everyday spheres. Maria Mälksoo (2012, 486) mentions amongst others "political dissidents, participants of social movements . . . [and] ethnic or socio-political minorities" that can face repercussions in their home countries by not agreeing with the socio-political mainstream. Equally, physical assaults against people that question common gender binaries and/or who do not succumb to societal norms give testament that liminality is a common characteristic of life-worlds globally.

Second, there is an intellectual aspect. People who have left their habitual surroundings frequent liminal spaces. Hence, they not only travel through different landscapes, but they also experience situations in which different languages are spoken, different customs pursued, different (religious) ceremonies performed, or different sign-systems employed (see Hellmann in this forum). Being out of the habitual, people cannot refer back to what Karl Mannheim (1985, 40) called "collective unconscious[ness]," in order to give meaning to these experiences and to act appropriately within these situations, as they realize that their collective knowledge can lead to dissatisfying results in the new environment. People might misunderstand an experience, do not know how to react at a given situation, and, consequently, they might trigger violence. To avoid these problems, information about distant places has to be collected. In the past, people's efforts were often in vain, as information was scarce, incoherent, and it did not always match common and/or scientific assumptions. Even today, in times of virtual meta-platforms, prospective travelers have to deal with conflicting information (Jeacle and Carter 2011). This aspect of precariousness can also affect people in liminal spaces at home. Facing an existential crisis, experiencing loss of meaning, and disruptions (Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015, 2–3) can break the connection to the collective memory, as it no longer provides a "framework of possibility" (Jenco 2015, 30) that helps people to master their everyday lives. However, by providing "a vital moment of creativity" (Mälksoo 2012, 481) liminality may lead to the development of new frameworks, as it enables to challenge the habitual.

As a result of their precariousness, liminal spaces inspire dialogues through three conditions. First, liminal spaces require prudence (Vorsicht) understood as "the ability to judge the rightness of a given action from among possible alternatives on the basis of its likely political consequences" (Korab-Karpowicz 2013). In liminal spaces, prudence is important because people want to avoid the mentioned dangers. However, their ability to judge is severely hampered, as their collective memory may prove useless in order to bring their experiences into a rational order. To avoid misjudgments, people have to critically reflect on their perspectives (Alejandro in this forum) in order to understand that inappropriate meaning-allocations may have taken place. However, this is not yet sufficient to avoid creating potentially dangerous situations, as it only leads to perplexity. To overcome it, people need to acquire or verify information through the exchange of knowledge either with people who are also in transit or with the local population. To this end, prudence encourages modesty, as people acknowledge "the limits of our knowledge of international practices, of

avoiding the making of hubristic claims" (Brown 2012, 456). It can be argued that this is different with people who experience liminal spaces as emancipatory, but even then, modesty has to prevail. One's socio-political agenda is just one perspective of the human condition and while it may be liberating for some, it may not be for others.

Second, liminal spaces visualize transience (Vergänglichkeit). In his study about railway carriages, Joseph de Sapio (2013, 202) writes that fellow travelers acted as "a temporary insulator . . . against the disorientation of travel and the discontinuities of identity as the traveler experienced new and changing landscapes." Experiencing diverging landscapes, built environments, and climatic zones, people physically and intellectually realize that space is not a static condition, but spatio-temporally dynamic. However, experiencing transience does not lead to "a total despatialization of life." Rather, a "crisis and a modification of our traditional experience of space and place" (Agnew 2007, 144) occurs, which points towards a second aspect of transience. Liminal spaces are socially constructed and, therefore, spatial meaning is dynamic. Since liminal spaces often have mono-functional purposes, these spaces only gain identity through human engagement with each other. Hence, transience helps people to understand that they can take ownership of space not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of adding personal, cognitive dimensions to the functional purposes of a site. Although they are realms of "great ambiguity" (Mälksoo 2012, 481), it is in these liminal spaces that societal changes are being triggered and new collective identities can emerge, as Bahar Rumelili (2003) has demonstrated for Turkish-Greek relations.

Finally, liminal spaces foster affection (Verständnis). Felix Berenskoetter (2007, 672) posits that "friendship is . . . less about solidarity by default and more about mutual learning, which entails sharing concerns, listening, and the willingness on both sides to adapt." In this sense, liminal spaces promote friendship. Mutual learning takes place in suasive interchanges, as people have to be willing to incorporate new knowledge and to question their previous knowledge if they want to reduce the potential of conflict. This condition, therefore, signifies the attempt to construct an image of security. Engaging with others helps to reduce feelings of insecurity, as it allows establishing a temporary habitual sphere. Sapio (2013, 202) demonstrates this aspect, arguing that "the role of the passenger . . . formed the backbone of the entire institution, becoming social identifier . . . knowledge storehouse, and . . . a community in miniature who aided each other when necessary." However, these communities are often transient and end or gradually vanish after liminal spaces elapse because these communities only exist due to the mutual stressful experience of travelling (Sapio 2013, 212–13). Therefore, rather than calling it friendship, as this term implies at least a moyenne durée, affection is better suited to capture the temporality of human encounters. Through the work of Andrew Linklater (2011, 90–105) and the Eliasian term of "affectedness," scholars can argue that a mutual understanding evolves, as people want to reduce potentialities of experiencing harm. This incites people into entering dialogues with others in order to gain information. Understanding objectivity as dynamic (Prügl 2012, 658), these dialogues lead to "emphatic cooperation" (Sylvester 2002, 242) in the sense that diverging viewpoints are being accepted as legitimate contributions in achieving peoples' ambitions.

To close, liminal spaces of the 'inter' give people the opportunity to experience "space as a capacity." This means that "space [turns into] . . . a category of . . . becoming, an emerging property of social relationships," as Alberto Jiménez (2003, 140) writes. People have the opportunity to understand space as no longer narrowed to a perception of the world as an ontologically predetermined category, but one that understands space as capable of changing. This has implications for IR (Mälksoo 2012, 484). Thinking about liminal spaces return the ownership of life-worlds to people which had been taken from them by neoliberalism and other ideologies because history is no longer perceived in essentialist categories of progress and conceptualizing international politics as determined by fixed entities in an anarchical structure loses its bearing. Furthermore, liminality with its persistence on becoming is in stark contrast to positivist approaches with their focus on being. Hence, thinking about liminal spaces can provide counterpoints to IR's "disciplining acts meant to police the sensible boundaries of politics, identity, [or] community" (Vrasti 2008, 300).